

Deputation on the Hickey Street development at Iluka

Dear Councillors

I understand that the above development will be discussed at this week's Council meeting. While acknowledging that the Joint Regional Planning Panel will have the final say on this, I would like all councillors to consider the following.

The numbers of almost every species of Australia's unique native fauna are in decline, with habitat loss known to be the primary cause. Many of those species are facing certain extinction in the immediate future if trends are not reversed, none more so than the iconic Koala.

So what is Council's record on the protection of Koalas? Well it's not good, in fact it is downright appalling. In the late 1980s, the then Department of Environment recognised the threat to koalas from development and resultant habitat loss along the north coast, and undertook a comprehensive review of those threats. That resulted in the formulation of strategies to protect the various remnant populations that had survived to that point in time, including the Iluka population.

The subsequent strategy for Iluka (C. Moon), which was eventually published in 1992, linked eight recently reported koala road-kills at Iluka to pressures from human population increases, and made a number of recommendations designed to help reverse the decline in numbers.

One of those recommendations was to rehabilitate previously sand-mined crown land west of Iluka road and south of the golf course, which was by that time already a recovering forest. That crown land of course, is today the proposed Hickey Street development site. Supplementary planting of koala feed trees was also suggested for that crown land, the Iluka Nature Reserve, other reserves, and privately owned, forested land adjoining the crown land to the north.

However, in the late 1990s, the then Maclean Shire Council, ignored the Moon recommendations and approved the bulldozing of some 5 hectares of forest to add 9 holes to the golf course. Shortly thereafter it approved the subdivision, and subsequent bulldozing of old-growth forest for the staged Sovereign Street residential development.

After the local land council gained possession of the crown land in a land claim, I understand any tree planting programs, undertaken by volunteers of course, were pretty much restricted to the Iluka Nature Reserve. As a result of all this, just 10 years after the strategy was released, another comprehensive survey (Lunney et al, 2002) concluded that the Iluka koala population was now functionally extinct.

An 80kph speed limit was imposed for a while along Iluka Road through the national park in an attempt to lessen the road carnage, not only of Koalas but the endangered Coastal Emu, but our local state member soon bowed to pressure from impatient locals, and the speed limit was removed.

Then in about 2005, as part of formulating a new LEP after the forced amalgamation of Councils, the newly formed Clarence Valley Council quietly rezoned the crown land from rural to residential.

For a short while after 2010, there were hopes of a revival of the Iluka koala population, with several sightings around the village, including a female with a joey on the Crown land itself. As a result, Council contracted *Biolink Ecological Consultants* to undertake a further survey, and in 2012, they released a report which stated “*that the suggestion of the demise of the Iluka population as reported by Lunney et al (2002) and the Recovery Plan (DECC 2008) (may have) been premature*”.

However, just as hopes were raised, the Hickey Street development was proposed, which will see a further 14ha of forest bulldozed, without any offsets provided whatsoever!. In recent months another development has also been proposed, which will see another hectare or more of old-growth Koala habitat bulldozed to extend the Anchorage Caravan Park.

So, sadly, in the face of this ongoing council approved onslaught, there appears to be little future for Iluka's koalas, or a number of other threatened species (the emus are already extinct on the peninsula) confirmed as using the Hickey Street habitat.

I have written 4 separate submissions opposing this development, and all have failed to halt the 'development at all cost' principles that have driven Council decisions for decades, but we live in hope of change, and ask that serious consideration be given to halting the looming extinction crisis.

Yours sincerely

John Edwards
Clarence Environment Centre